Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – August 23, 2011

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Burlington) Bizzare summer: we had more river water in the fields this spring than I've seen in 18 years and less water in the river channel by early August than any time since 2001. Found late blight in our field tomatoes on August 13. With the dry weather and a few prior copper applications, things don't look so bad; a big difference from 2009 when even incessant sprays barely staved it off. Overall outdoor tomatoes are the best we've had in years. Potatoes as yet unaffected by late blight, though the hopper burn has really taken over since I got tired of applying Pyganic for mediocre efficacy in mid-July. Interesting that 'Keuka Gold' appears to have better field tolerance of leafhopper than any of the others cultivars: Kennebec (which had been best in prior years), Red Maria, Carola, Superior, and Red Norland. In the onions we really like the look of 'Siskiyou', an improved 'Walla Walla' type available through High Mowing Seed. Without Walla Walla to compare to directly I can't say with certainty (aside from 2011 being a generally good onion year), but Siskiyou appears more disease resistant than Walla Walla and our other cultivars. Siskiyou sized up nicely and the necks dried down well and made some really nice bulbs (and a few 2 pounders); this with a late start in the field. Still uncertain of effect of white vs. black poly effect on onion thrips population, though damage doesn't look significantly different in our trial.

(Waitsfield) Late blight has claimed its toll; it came in over the stormy weekend and I can confirm it is also in the potatoes. It is widespread all over the valley and in two of my fields 4 miles apart.

(Kathmandu, Nepal) This has to be the furthest distance anyone ever filed a Vermont field report from! As I left Putney 2 days ago, our onion harvest was about 1/3 done with the rest of the crop due to be harvested this week and next. Crop looks excellent with large size and no disease seen. Trialed some different varieties and if the crew can keep them separated should have some nice comparisons to report. Thrip damage was very low with good control from Entrust or just a low onion thrip year. Winter squashes maturing fast with Acorns and Sunshine ready to pick soon as we want. Unsure of the yields until the fields all brought in. Fall carrots and beets looking nice despite some germination issues with carrots. Top dressed with fertilizer to give them a little kick. Tunnel tomatoes are flooding in just when demand is flagging a bit. Sales at our main farmers' market are doing well while the newer smaller markets are suffering from lack of customers. Too many farmers' markets? The 33kwh solar generating project should be finished in 2 weeks; it looks awesome and can't wait to start getting checks from the power company! Our Barn rehab is also well under way with the crew getting ready to pour a 3,000 sq. ft. concrete floor when I return. Just in time to start bringing the fall crops in. Seed garlic almost all dried and nematode testing reporting a clean bill of health; we will start fulfilling orders also when I return in 2 weeks. This morning we are flying to a remote section of Nepal and then drive through 7 rivers and washed out roads to begin my vegetable development project in Nepal.

Small farms, hilly steep land, without access to internet or resources; sounds a lot like Vermont! I look forward to doing a presentation next year to share with you all.

(Brandon) Lots of ground opening up now for fall covers. Our rotations planned for this season went south after all the rains this spring, so trying to adjust now for next year. We used a cover crop roller this year for the first time. It worked very well in winter rye, as we planted right through the rolled mulch. Where the rye was good and heavy, no annual weeds were a problem; only weed issues were with existing perennials like grasses. Next season we plan on doing both direct seeded and some transplanted crops through this. We will probably need to adjust our transplanter to make it work, but thinking a water wheel would work great if we add a coulter up front. Our goal is to reduce extensive tillage, including all that time and fuel and wear and tear on our soils. It would also be great to lose the plastic mulch for mid-season cucurbits. The biggest limitation in our northern climate seems to be the need to wait till cover crop has reached enough maturity that when rolled it will die as opposed to regrowing. For rye this is more or less early to mid-June at the earliest. If you use herbicides, could be done much earlier.

(Shaftsbury) Alternaria showing up in all our different Brassica fields. Seven inches of rain in the last week. Corn blown over by storms. Planting fall spinach and greens. Corn earworm moths around. Onions all harvested and look good so far. NO nematodes in our garlic; a small success for the year. Cover cropping to start in earnest this week. The few sweet potatoes we have dug so far seem to have a good amount of scurf; not sure what to do about it, but still able to sell to our winter CSA folks I think, but they do not look good enough for the farmstand.

(Durham CT) Our tomatoes are all grown in hoop houses. Some of my farmer friends told me that their field tomatoes just split wide open after the last rain, but we're enjoying huge and very marketable heirlooms. At market they are still looked at as weird by some people, while others line up craving the tomatoes that ‘their grandfather grew’ when they were little. They're right, heirloom tomatoes are delicious beyond description (but not every variety). We give out samples and so many times customers will say the very same thing, in much the same way: ‘Oh my God!’ One puzzle we have with the tomatoes seems to be Fusarium in one of the houses. Since we grafted onto Maxiforts we were hoping to avoid this problem. I don't have a definite diagnosis yet but in our new house, where we didn't graft because the ground had never grown tomatoes before, we have confirmed Fusarium, which seems too early for this to occur. We are looking towards fall crops now. Napoli carrots planted and up; beets growing well; turnips, parsnips, fall brassicas, and spinach very soon. We'll be taking the tomatoes out slowly starting in mid-September and putting late fall early winter crops in the hoophouses. Planning to start some carrots and lettuce really late, so that we can get a good jump on next Spring’s crop. For those of you looking for inexpensive way to protect winter crops, we highly recommend low tunnels. Make sure to put lots of sandbags on them to avoid the wind blowing the plastic away. Also, keep the tunnels a reasonable length so that they are less of a target for wind; 30 feet might work for you, depending on how much wind you get in your area.

(Argyle NY) After 23 years of farming, our family finally took a summer vacation and we were gone 2 weeks while our good crew kept up as best they could. Most crops are doing well despite the ups and downs with rain and heat, but a few diseases are kicking in like downy on the basil (which we've never found a good control for) and powdery mildew on the squash. Tomatoes are finally producing and look good; field cukes going crazy and tunnel summer veggies are nearing their retirement.

The sweet potatoes look good and the Plant Skydd is working great to keep deer out of them and the beets. Onion crop when we left was green and beautiful but now is down and drying up with a little purple blotch. Won't be a bumper year, but okay. We will be seeding the onions for the early spring production again by onion sets. Our trials went well with that and each year we improve, more details on that next time. Markets are still strong with our high diversity of offerings. Soon we'll be thinking about seeding for winter production.

(Salisbury NH) Harvesting, trying to beat back the weeds, and getting hoophouse ready for fall plantings. Garlic is all going soft; looks like we'll have to buy seed garlic in order to plant this fall. Not happy with New Zealand spinach; it grew in the heat but customer feedback was not positive. Beets got too big on some of the earlier plantings. Not woody but better for pickled beets. Still getting nice broccoli; second plantings of cauliflower is looking better with less heat and more rain plus we will get them blanched with elastics. Beans galore. Tomatoes are fantastic. The only complaint about Jetstar is that there are too many huge ones. Many customers want a smaller salad tomato. Cabbage doesn't sell much in summer. Want to get commercial kitchen some day and make coleslaw. Fall peas have blossoms and some pods. Walla Walla onions were great again. Tomato hornworms showed up en masse; they hide so well. Guessing we have twice-stabbed stink bugs on mainly the snapdragons. Don't seem to be doing any damage but they don't come off easily even dunking them in water. Carrots got big fast. Many had multiple legs (is that nematodes?). Also quite a few split. Millionaire eggplants were loaded this year. Black Beauty seemed to only produce one or two good sized fruit. Cucumbers producing like crazy, mainly Marketmore.

FROM THE UVM PLANT DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Late blight has been confirmed samples from Burlington, Jericho and Hinesburg with reports of the disease from growers in Northfield, Waitsfield, Greensboro, Hyde Park, Berlin, Moretown, Warren and Walden in both field and greenhouse tomatoes. Given the recent wet weather the disease will continue to show up around the state on a regular basis. Keeping tissue protected with fungicides is the best insurance at this point. In greenhouses, good ventilation will help but when late blight arrives via spores on the wind currents into the greenhouse and humidity is high, the spores can infect. Some growers have wondered whether closing sides to keep out spores would be beneficial but I suspect this would only serve to raise humidity. Probably best to keep sides open and air moving to lower humidity and protect the plants with fungicides. High temps and dry conditions will help keep it at bay only to start back up again when conditions change. For organic growers, spraying with copper is the most effective control but may result in having to wash fruit before marketing. Scout houses and fields diligently and spray rigorously (5 day intervals for organic) at first evidence of the disease.

Yellow shoulder disorder on tomatoes has been reported by growers, especially on heirlooms. It appears to be caused by a complex of factors with varietal susceptibility, weather conditions and soil nutrition being implicated. In high tunnels, shade cloth may help to lower temps.
http://www.hightunnels.org/PDF/JETT_High_Tunnel_Temp_Mgt.pdf
http://vegetablemdonline.ppath.cornell.edu/NewsArticles/Tom_ComDis.htm
http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/tomato/prese2004.pdf

Leaf mold is showing up on a fair amount on field tomatoes. Until last year, this fungal disease was only a problem in greenhouses, but now seems to be more of an outdoor issue. Look for yellow spots on the upper side of the leaf starting lower in plant with fuzzy brown/purplish spores on the leaf undersides associated with the spots. The disease is promoted by high humidty and poor air circulation; there is a lot of varietal resistance.

Gummy stem blight suspected on melons in the Rutland area causing a gummy exudate on lower stems. This can be a common destructive foliar and stem problem in cucurbits. The fruit rot phase of the disease is called black rot, and is common on butternut squash. See: http://vegetablemdonline.ppath.cornell.edu/factsheets/Cucurbit_GSBlight.htm

BASIL DOWNY MILDEW

This new and destructive disease of basil was discovered in the U.S. in 2007; during 2008 it occurred from Florida to Massachusetts and in 2009 moved into northern New England. We do not believe it can overwinter here but we are still learning about this disease. The pathogen is new to science and was named Peronospora belbahrii in 2009. The symptoms on basil resemble nitrogen deficiency, see: http://extension.umass.edu/vegetable/alerts/basil-downy-mildew. The pathogen can be seed-borne but we don't expect it is widespread in seed. This year downy mildew-infected basil plants were common in 'big box stores' in MA, as was late blight in 2009. Since it can be active all year long in the southern U.S. it is advisable not to buy transplants started in the south. Robert Wick at the University of Massachusetts is doing research on this disease and would like to get live specimens from the field. Contact him at 413-545-1045 or rwick@pltpath.umass.edu if you can offer some diseased plants.

DIRECT MARKET PRODUCE PRICE REPORTS

Reminder, if you direct market produce in Vermont you can submit price reports anytime at: http://www.uvm.edu/farmpricing/. Log in on the right hand side of the page; the first time only you must create your account with email and password. The results are aggregated and posted every couple of weeks at: http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/ProducePriceReports.html